

## 1. Projects



# Internships abroad: what benefits for students in Alsace?

Finished research  
Begin: October 2015  
End: November 2018

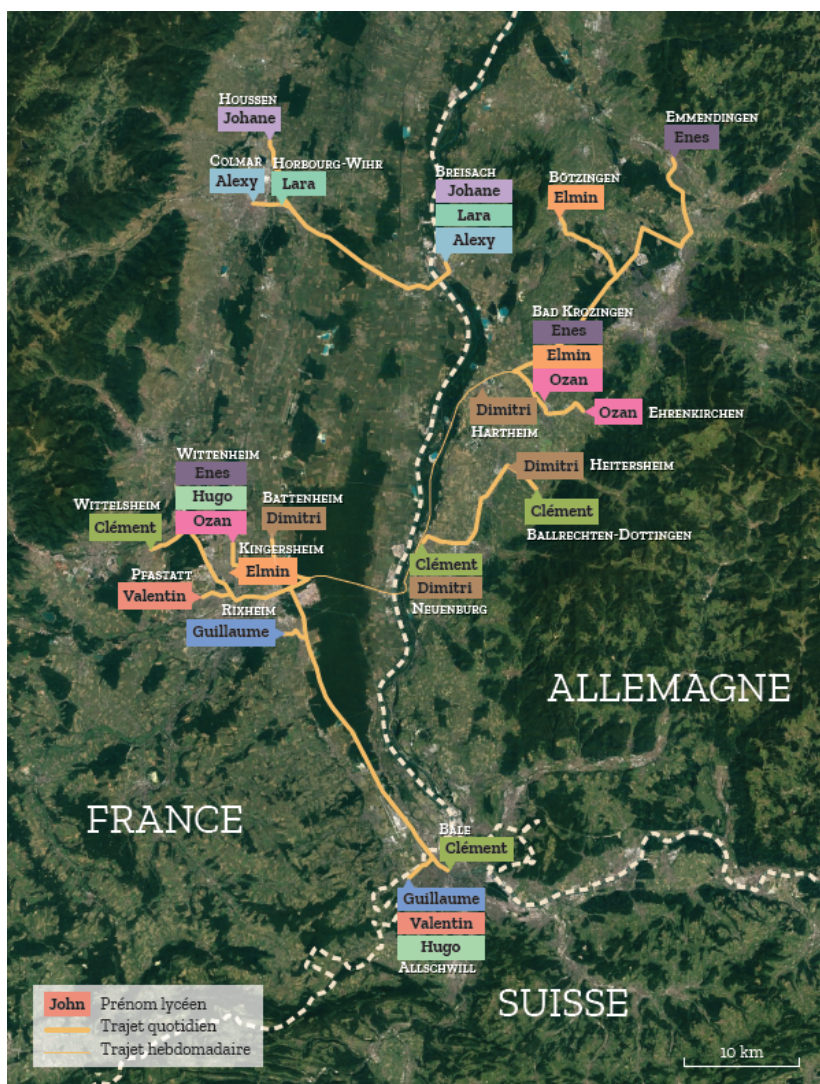
The project entitled "Internships abroad: what benefits for students in Alsace?" led by Vincent Goulet, a researcher in sociology at the University of Strasbourg and with the SAGE laboratory, looked at how professional cross-border mobility (internships) altered (or not) the representations, mobility habits and life projects of eleven vocational high-school students in Alsace.

Research participants

- Vincent Goulet

## I. The Research

The project called "Internships abroad: what benefits for students in Alsace?" followed, over a two-year period, eleven high-school students enrolled in a special program called "Azubi-Bacpro." This intercultural program with a focus on learning German allows vocational high-school students to perform two six to eight week internships in Germany and Switzerland in order to increase their employability abroad.



The central hypothesis of the research and of this vocational program is that such an experience of cross-border mobility leads to transformations in these young people's representations and aspirations, both professionally and personally. The Mobile Lives Forum was particularly interested in studying a public program that fed into a societal expectation to be internationally mobile, in order to see whether it corresponded to the students' own aspirations and find out what consequences it would have on their life projects and relationship to mobility.

To answer these questions, Vincent Goulet, sociologist at the University of Strasbourg and associate of SAGE (Societies, Actors and Government in Europe), has applied a qualitative, longitudinal method of interviews, conducting three with each subject: one before the first internship abroad, the second between the two internships and the third after graduating from the "Azubi-Bacpro" program. In total, 33 filmed interviews were carried out between October 2015 and July 2017 with 11 students: 8 students in the Charles de Gaulle vocational high school in Pulversheim, near Mulhouse (studying electrical engineering) and 3 students in the Martin Schongauer vocational high-school in Colmar (studying business).

## II. The Results

This research highlights how mobility is an ambivalent phenomenon, in that it presents people with daily challenges all the while empowering them with the means to be open to the world.

The research first of all sheds light on the motives that drive cross-border mobility for these young students from Alsace who are strongly encouraged by their family and school environment. And the primary reason for them to embark on this cross-border adventure is the hope of finding future job opportunities with more attractive salaries abroad. This border region's specific location, geographically very close to both Germany and Switzerland, helps explain why these students form such cross-border ambitions.

### 1. Cross-border mobility is a challenging experience for individuals, both in their bodies and in their social relations

People experience mobility as something that is forced and challenging, as a necessary condition to access employment. The forced aspect of this mobility is even stronger considering that it is primarily born out of family strategies and not the students' own desires. Cross-border mobility is then challenging in four specific ways: geographically, as the students must physically travel to another country; linguistically, as they grapple with learning German; culturally, as they learn new ways of working; and finally, socially.

The experience of these young high-school students shows that mobility is not harmless and inconsequential for their bodies and minds. The stress of travelling unknown routes, the fear of getting lost and the exhaustion of lengthy commutes all combine to make mobility a daily struggle that is

continuously renewed. This is made especially apparent by these young students' physical tiredness, which is also caused by the working conditions of their internships (schedules and job requirements).

This study thereby also confirms how central work is to their life goals. Through these internships abroad, these high-school students are led to internalize both the societal expectation of mobility - you have to be willing to travel for work - and the demands of tough working conditions - independence and adulthood are earned through confronting the harshness of life.

This experience also challenges existing social relations and tends to reinforce the stronger ties of family and very close friends. It also provides an opportunity to reevaluate weaker and more casual relationships. As such, the study reveals how important family and social ties are to these young subjects.

## **2. ... but one that, ultimately, helps enhance these young people's ability to act and move**

Going through this test of mobility and the challenges it implies is something that is valued by students and those around them. Seen as a rite of passage, the cross-border experience helps these youths gain independence and gives them the means to further act on their future. Succeeding in this professional experience abroad and reaping the social rewards increases their propensity to further form cross-border mobility projects in the future.

However, not all young people come out of this experience with a desire to live and work abroad. While cross-border mobility broadened their possible futures with foreign opportunities, both professionally and socially, it also strengthened their attachment to their own land and close social circle. This duality, between the practical benefits of being abroad (prices, salary, jobs) and the attachment to a land of origin, became synthesized in some subjects who reported a desire to become cross-border workers, living here and working there. Interestingly, subjects who reported such a desire did not mention commuting times or mobility-related tiredness as factors in their compromise.

Finally, while taking part in the Azubi-Bacpro program undoubtedly empowers students and reinforces their desire to be mobile, cross-border mobility is all the more present when it is based on a family tradition, mainly in two ways: on the one hand, when there are prior cross-border mobility practices (such as routine commutes or trips abroad) and on the other, when families call upon their ties and networks abroad to help with the internship or with finding work later.

Overall, the Azubi-Bacpro program seems to be achieving its goal given that its young participants harbor ambitions of working abroad in the future. They have significantly improved their proficiency in German as well as their traveling know-how. It remains hard to say at this stage however whether this program's more long-term objectives will be achieved, in particular helping its participants find work.

## **III. To go further**

### **1. Link to the program's official page**

<http://www.ac-strasbourg.fr/academie/actualites-academiquest/actualite/article/azubi-bacpro>

### **2. Download the synthesis (available in french only)**

**Les stages frontaliers :  
un atout « mobilité » pour les jeunes en lycée professionnel ?**

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avec le soutien de

**3. Download final report (available in french only)**



**Mobility**

For the Mobile Lives Forum, mobility is understood as the process of how individuals travel across distances in order to deploy through time and space the activities that make up their lifestyles. These travel practices are embedded in socio-technical systems, produced by transport and communication industries and techniques, and by normative discourses on these practices, with considerable social, environmental and spatial impacts.

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Associated Thematics :

Lifestyles

- Diversity of lifestyles
- Work

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